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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 621  
By Fowler

A RESOLUTION to honor and recognize Harold Coker for his  
years of extraordinary public service.

WHEREAS, it is fitting that the members of this General Assembly should pause to pay tribute to those estimable public servants who have served this state and nation and their respective communities with the utmost courage, dedication, and integrity; and

WHEREAS, Harold Coker is most assuredly one such admirable citizen who is richly deserving of this Body's commendation; and

WHEREAS, in his years of public service and especially in his endeavors as a member of the Hamilton County Commission, he has distinguished himself as a conscientious and dedicated public servant and as a man of honor and probity; and

WHEREAS, thirty years ago, Mr. Coker, feeling very strongly that as a successful businessman he should give back to his community, began three decades of public service that have made a positive difference in the lives of his fellow citizens; and

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WHEREAS, Harold Coker became involved in politics in an effort to ensure that people of integrity were elected to government offices at the local, state, and national levels; and

WHEREAS, he served as a precinct worker in 1973, and was elected as County Republican Party Chairman in 1975; during this time, he also spearheaded a successful attempt to persuade his local Republican Party to select its candidates in a primary election rather than at a convention, thus allowing the party to expand; and

WHEREAS, in 1976, Mr. Coker served as a delegate to the Republican National Convention and was elected President of the Antique Automobile Club of America; both positions provided an outstanding opportunity for him to gain experience serving in an elected office; and

WHEREAS, feeling that there was corruption in the business practices of the City of Chattanooga's school system and determined to expel it, Harold Coker ran for a position on his city's school board; and

WHEREAS, he next decided to run for the Hamilton County Commission and was elected in 1982; after his installation as a commissioner, he pressed for answers regarding the activities of Chattanooga's school board; and his determination to uncover the truth led to the exposure of the corruption he suspected; and

WHEREAS, during his illustrious tenure as a County Commissioner, economic development and the stability of Hamilton County has been one of Mr. Coker's primary concerns; accordingly, Mr. Coker has been a vital part of the establishment of several industrial parks, that helped to provide employment for many citizens, and has helped refurbish the River Port and develop the scenic River Walk; and

WHEREAS, working with Congressman Robin Beard, he helped to return eleven hundred acres to county government jurisdiction from federal government control, thereby putting land back into the hands of private citizens and increasing property tax revenues for local governments; and

WHEREAS, learning from his business experience that the leaner and sharper that a government operates its business, the lower the cost for its citizens, Mr. Coker set about to make Hamilton County Government more efficient, and in doing so, discovered that the Hamilton County Government had been buying gas for county vehicles at a retail price for over ten years and questioned the financial wisdom of this policy; as a result of his efforts, companies were required to submit bids to supply the county with gasoline, resulting in a lower gas price and, over the years, saving the taxpayers of Hamilton County millions of dollars; and

WHEREAS, an astute and industrious leader, Mr. Coker was active in the privatization of prisons at the local level and assisted Hamilton County in acquiring its first forensic pathologist, pathology laboratory, and full-time DUI prosecutor; his ingenuity and leadership in prison privatization has helped County government secure adequate operational funds for its Sheriff's department and establish safer prisons; and

WHEREAS, believing that his excellent education played a significant role in his success in business, Harold Coker worked to ensure that the children of Hamilton County received the best education possible; he tirelessly served to secure funding for schools and playgrounds, and voted for increases in teachers' pay, which, during his tenure as a Commissioner, has doubled; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Coker, a highly respected member of the Hamilton County Commission, served as County Commission Chairman from 1985 to 1986, 1995, and from 1998 to 1999; and

WHEREAS, after an unsuccessful bid for the 3<sup>rd</sup> District Congressional Seat, Harold Coker assisted in the establishment of the National Coalition to End the Permanent Congress, which helped to bring about a national change in congressional elections; and

WHEREAS, in 1986, Mr. Coker was appointed by President Ronald Reagan to serve on the National Highway Safety Advisory Committee, earning him the distinction of being the first independent tire dealer to receive a presidential appointment; and

WHEREAS, while serving on the Advisory Committee, he realized that something needed to be done about the high incidence of serious injury and death caused by highway accidents and became an active supporter of seat belt laws and maximum blood alcohol levels for drivers; and

WHEREAS, Harold Coker was instrumental in the passage of the Child Safety Restraint Bill and other seat belt laws by the Tennessee General Assembly; due to the efforts of Mr. Coker, and individuals like him, Tennessee was the first state in the nation to pass a Child Safety Restraint law, which served as a model for the rest of the nation; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Coker altruistically obtained nearly half a million dollars of federal grant money to form the DUI task force and organize the ACTS Council in Hamilton County; and

WHEREAS, because Harold Coker, along with his wife, Lill, worked to make the streets of America safer by urging the use of seat belts and abstinence from alcohol and drugs while driving, the Coker family received the Great American Family Community Award in 1983; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Coker's meritorious service has gone far beyond his service as a local elected official; he was selected as President of the National Tire Dealers Association in 1984 and was later awarded the National Faith in American Business Award for his efforts to establish enterprise zones; he set in motion an effort to close massage parlors and pornography shops in Hamilton County and worked to educate his community about the dangers of pornography and the destructive influence it has on families; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Coker is the much deserved recipient of the 1985 Sertoma Service to Mankind Award and the 2000 Public Education Foundation Award; he was also named Volunteer of the Year by the Heart Association for 1986-1987; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Coker's noteworthy success as a public servant and community leader is directly attributable to his reliance on the time-honored values of integrity, hard work, and faith in God and his uncommon ability to work well with people from all walks of life; and

WHEREAS, he epitomizes the ideal of the consummate professional, dedicated public servant, faithful son, devoted husband, loving father, and reliable friend and neighbor; and

WHEREAS, his many accomplishments and awards aside, Harold Coker is most appreciative of the love and companionship he shares with his wife, Lill; and

WHEREAS, he is wholly committed to the noble precepts of public service that have earned Tennessee recognition as the "Volunteer State"; and

WHEREAS, he has meritoriously served on the Hamilton County Commission for twenty years, and will be retiring in August of 2002; he will leave behind an indelible legacy of astute leadership and the foundation for future growth and prosperity; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Coker has served the Hamilton County Commission and the good people of Hamilton County with distinction; his professional wisdom and insight will be greatly missed; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED SECOND GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, That we hereby honor and recognize Harold Coker for his selfless and steadfast service as a Hamilton County Commissioner, commend him on twenty years of excellence as a member of the commission, and salute his laudable achievements in government and public safety on the local, state, and national levels.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That we express to Mr. Coker our heartfelt wishes for a happy and fulfilling retirement and every continued success in his future endeavors.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.

